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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (09/16): Palestinian press report  
on efforts to move the peace process forward

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Main Stories:  
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The local press highlights the meetings of Special Envoy George Mitchell with Israeli and Palestinian Authority (PA) officials on September 15. The coverage notes that Mitchell did not reach an agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during their meeting yesterday and that they will continue discussions today. One headline reads, "Mitchell admits he failed to convince Netanyahu to freeze settlements." After meeting with PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and President Mahmoud Abbas, Mitchell stated to the press that he had productive meetings and noted that he will continue his talks with the Israelis today. Palestinian Liberation Organization Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat stated that the PA will not compromise on the issue of settlements and will not meet with the Israelis unless settlement activity is completely stopped. Referring to the proposed trilateral meeting between President Obama, Abbas and Netanyahu, Erekat said that the PA will not meet for the sake of meeting and that there should be a clear vision to end the occupation.

In related news, the local press runs coverage on Erekat denying news reports in the Israeli daily Haaretz that Erekat had a secret meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres to discuss the anticipated trilateral meeting in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front pages news on Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman reiterating yesterday that the Israeli government is ready to meet with Palestinian officials to revive the peace process. Lieberman blamed the Palestinians for their refusal to meet, according to coverage. He added that the issue of settlements is not a real issue but rather a "misunderstanding."

The dailies report on the continued attacks by settlers against Palestinian citizens. The reports note that one group attacked a Palestinian farmer and slaughtered 15 of his sheep near the Yizhar settlement south of Nablus on September 15. Al-Quds front pages a photo of a settler throwing wine on a Palestinian woman yesterday in the Old City of Hebron.

Al-Ayyam front page news on Palestinian officials revealing to Maan News Network that President Abbas will issue a presidential decree by October 25 calling for presidential and legislative elections in January 2010. The sources noted that Hamas is trying to postpone the elections to continue the state of division.

News on the UN fact finding report on the recent conflict in Gaza receives front page coverage in the three dailies. According to the report by UN investigator Richard Goldstone, Israel and Hamas committed war crimes during the January 2009 war. Both Israel and Hamas have rejected the findings. The report recommends that the UN bring the issue to the International Criminal Court.

The dailies report that Egypt opened the Rafah border crossing for three days before the Eid holiday.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title "Open Questions" (09/16): "Given the extensive talks that the US is conducting with all parties to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

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... is Israeli really ready for peace when they refuse to freeze settlement activity? On the contrary, what matters to Israel is deepening the occupation and denying the Palestinians rights while it misleads the entire world with peace slogans ... The most important question that should be asked of the Americans and Europeans is what has Israel left for the negotiations after all its recent actions? What would we negotiate over?"

2) Hani Habib opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the title "Mitchell's Fifth Visit ... and Obama's Options" (09/16): "From Ireland to the Middle East, US Special Envoy George Mitchell conducts one round of talks after another hoping to make the kind of progress he achieved in Ireland, which doesn't seem to be easy to repeat in the Middle East ... Here he conducts his fifth round of talks, and the only new development is that his failure is more obvious ... His meeting with Netanyahu today shows that there are still questions to be answered."

RUBINSTEIN